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THE PICTURES AT THE PARIS EXHIBITION.

I.

THE ENGLISH SECTION.



ALTHOUGH the existence of the Paris Exhibition is now (May 20th) to be counted by weeks instead of by days, it is far from being in complete order. Many departments are as yet in disorder—many exhibitors have failed to finish the installation of their wares. This is particularly true as regards the French section. The foreigners have worked

faithfully and well, but the greater part of the division devoted to native Art and manufactures still shows lamentable gaps amid its displays.

The Art-section, it is true, is very nearly ready, but the catalogue still is lacking. And its general arrangement cannot but be regarded as injurious to the general effect. In place of one grand gallery, or series of galleries, recalling the grandiose halls of the Louvre, this department has been cut up into a number of small, separate rooms. Nor can the visitor, in passing through the long series of apartments, study at ease the different developements of Art among the different nations. The pictures of France are intruded on two separate divisions among the other Art-exhibits, so that one has to keep a sharp lookout to see whether the works under examination are French or belong to some other nationality. The pavilion of the City of Paris cuts the Art-section into two parts. And, altogether, France has not only taken the lion's share of space, but has so managed matters as to confuse the student of Art as much as possible. In other respects the department is fairly well fitted for the purpose to which it is applied. The ceilings are low, the walls coloured with a red wash, and the light being wholly admitted from above, screens of white muslin are used to temper its undue fervour or crudeness.

The English Art-department is thoroughly ready, catalogue and all, and it is on that account that I shall commence my Art-studies of the Exhibition with the English pictures. The English exhibit is peculiarly interesting, as representing the very cream of English Art for the last ten years. No efforts have been spared to render the display a brilliant and imposing one. The owners of valuable pictures have not hesitated to trust their treasures to the mercy of a long journey and a six months' detention. Had American collectors so acted, this portion of our exhibit would wear a different aspect from what it does to-day. Going through the English section, one sees what their leading artists have been doing for years past. If some among the new lights are absent, the old, fixed stars burn with a steady and vivid radiance. The furnishing and arrangement of the department, too, are charming. Low divans covered with a white-grounded, chintz-patterned stuff, full *portières* of the same material, soft cocoa matting on the floor, and a profusion of plants grouped amid the statuary, lend to the whole an aspect of mingled comfort and elegance that is very captivating. Even the catalogue, with its cover in blended tints of blue-grey and chocolate-brown, is handsomely gotten up, as well as complete and thorough, and, moreover, it was ready to the moment.

Perhaps no picture in this department attracts more attention than does 'A Yeoman of the Guard,' by Millais—a single three-quarter figure of one of the guardians of the Tower, painted in the quaint and characteristic costume that has come down from the days of Henry VIII. The old man is seated, grasping his official halberd, and the light strikes strongly across his weather-beaten face and white-gloved hand. The rich scarlet of his dress and hose, slightly relieved by the black-velvet ornamentation of his doublet, is marvellously reproduced without any crudeness or glare, and with a breadth and mastery of execution that recall some of the best effects of Meissonier. Unfortunately, the painting is covered with glass, a circumstance which detracts from the general effect, and gives to the work the aspect of a highly-finished water-colour.

The two large landscapes by Millais, entitled respectively 'Over the Hills and far away' and 'Chill October,' no less reveal his

wonderful mastery of the brush. The first, a far-reaching prospect of Scottish hills, in a sunlit distance, spanned by a rainbow, has much of that effect of illimitable distance which is to be found in some of Church's pictures of mountain-scenery. The last-named painting is touched with the melancholy of the season that it represents—an English autumn—not our golden, gorgeous fall, but the sad decadence of the year, faded, drear, and cheerless. The grey skies mirror themselves in the glassy water—the brown reeds rustle in the marshy foreground—the brightness and gaiety of Nature have passed away, and through her veins is creeping the chill of coming dissolution. A nobly-painted work, and one wherein the mournful poetry of the tragedy of the year is exquisitely represented. As a portrait-painter, Millais suffers by comparison with his great French contemporaries.

Landseer "being dead, yet liveth" on the walls of the Exhibition with six of his later works, one or two of which, at least, were shown at our Exhibition. Of the rest, the most striking is probably the 'Swannery invaded by Eagles.' The helplessness of the great, beautiful birds in the clutches of their cruel assailants, has something unutterably pathetic about it. The noble swan that, with outspread, blood-stained wings, and slender neck writhing in the pitiless gripe of its slayer, occupies the foreground, is a very image of defenceless suffering. Still deeper, because more human, is the tragedy of 'Man proposes and God disposes'—the white bears amid the icebergs and beneath the grey, snow-laden skies of a polar landscape, toying with the relics of some perished exploring-expedition: a faded flag, a telescope, a shattered mast, and the fragments of a human skeleton. His 'Sick Monkey' represents rather a monkey family—the mother nursing her suffering offspring, while the father, in the background, devours oranges in selfish content. The other Landseers in the Exhibition are 'The Connoisseurs' (the portrait of the artist), and 'The Indian Tent,' both loaned by the Prince of Wales, and 'The Ptarmigan Hill.'

Frith's 'Derby-Day' and 'Railway-Station' are well known to the American public. The singular vividness and vitality of this artist's talent are also well displayed in the large historical picture entitled 'The Last Sunday of Charles II. at Whitehall.' It is the well-known passage from Macaulay's history translated into canvas and paint, the "glorious gallery" thronged with courtiers, the grave gentlemen advancing to pay their respects, and the sultan-king seated between the Duchess of Portsmouth and Hortensia Mancini, toying with the silken tresses of the first, while listening to the love-songs warbled by Hortensia's French page. In the background a party sits playing cards before a table heaped with gold, and a gay gallant slips a note into the hand of one of the lady-players, while a portly bishop looks on, and another courtier lightly taps his lordship on the shoulder and points out to his notice the bell that in the belfry of a neighbouring church is ringing out a call to prayers. 'The Gold-Room at Homburg,' and 'Under the Doge's Palace,' complete the list of this fine artist's contributions.

To G. D. Leslie belongs the meed of most exquisitely representing the innocent loveliness of young English girlhood. His 'School revisited' shows a very cluster of these sweet human rosebuds, not the least fair of whom is the charming bride who, in picturesque old English costume, sits upon a bench in the school-garden, and surrenders her ungloved hand, with its wedding-ring, for the inspection of a group of her former companions, while another looks down upon the proceedings from an elevated window. They are so lovely, these young creatures, so pure and sweet in their girlish freshness! Equally charming are the two damsels in the picture entitled 'Pot-pourri,' who are engaged in manufacturing that dainty compound of flower-petals and sweet-scented spices. Charming, too, are the dainty maidens who are trying to guess at the decrees of Fate by dropping flowers in a running stream in the work called 'Fortunes.' Celia, not Shakespeare's, but a sweet modern damsel in white, with a wreath of roses around her neck,

and Thomson's "Lovely young Lavinia," resting on a stile, with her burden of wheat-ears, also find places among this group of types of exquisite girlhood. After the nudities and the *demi-mondaines* of the French school, this fair and winsome assemblage brings to the soul a positive sense of elevation and of refreshment.

Calderon, too, can paint a lady: the elegant dame in the foreground of his picture, 'On her Way to the Throne,' is a very image of high-bred grace. Superb in her powder, her laces, and satins, the queenly lady pauses for a moment to suffer her anxious hair-dresser to give a last turn to the curl that falls upon her swan-like neck. Two lackeys wait to draw aside the tapestry *portières*, to give her entrance to the royal presence. Behind her come her friends and companions in the presentation, fair and elegant, like herself. That supreme air of distinction which is so hard to render, pervades the atmosphere of this picture, subtle, delicate, and intangible as a perfume.

The 'Lucrezia Borgia' of Mr. Elmore is a strange and striking work. The Duchess of Ferrara stands beside a doorway, the curtain of which her companion, a truculent-looking hero, has just drawn aside. She stays his progress with a gesture, perhaps hesitating to trust the execution of her purpose to his dagger, and preferring to confide in the powers of the crystal phial that she holds half-concealed amid the folds of her drapery. The light from the open doorway strikes full across her fair, sinister face, and lights with lurid lustre her *crêpé*, red-gold hair, and crimson-velvet robe. Less characteristic and striking is the countenance of the queen in the picture entitled 'Mary Queen of Scots and Darnley at Jedburgh.' The Scottish syren is depicted as a beautiful and gentle-looking woman, who strives to win her surly lord to acquiescence in her will by her earnest pleading. The tall figure of the sulky, recalcitrant Darnley, in his black-velvet doublet, is the best point in the picture.

Mr. Alma-Tadema figures in the Exhibition with no less than ten works, with most of which the Parisian public are already familiar. Yet, this artist, neither by birth nor by talent, can be counted among the English painters. The refinements of his colouring, the perfection of his drawing, belong more to the French school; while his subjects are chosen wholly from the antique. Like Hector Leroux, he devotes himself to the reproduction of the scenes and characters of ancient Rome. But Leroux puts upon canvas the poetry and the legendary lore of that remote past. A dreamy and mystic atmosphere envelopes his scenes and his personages. To Alma-Tadema belong rather the daily life and the reality of the ancient world. He is a master of his art, cold, correct, serious, never yielding to the claims of sensationalism, nor drifting into the vagueness of idealism.

From the pencil of Mr. Yeames we have a bright little scene from the social life of the last century. Two sedan-chairs have been placed opposite to each other in a wide and handsome street. In the one stands a powdered cavalier in crimson velvet, and in the other a lady in rose-coloured brocade, their heads just appearing over the top framework. They are exchanging some last remarks and confidential disclosures, while their attendants wait to

shut down the covers of the sedan-chairs, and to carry them off. In the background a gorgeous coach rumbles heavily away. In very different style is the 'Death of Amy Robsart,' by this artist, a large painting showing the fair form of the hapless lady extended lifeless at the foot of a staircase, while her murderers peer anxiously from the topmost steps, to see if their work has been well accomplished.

The 'Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward,' by Mr. Luke Fildes, is a heart-rending picture, in the truthful simplicity and realism of its representation of the sufferings of the London poor. Full of life and movement also is the 'Saturday Night in the East End of London,' by Mr. Barnard. These paintings, with Frith's 'Derby-Day' and 'Railway-Station,' have the conspicuous merit of being vigorous and literal transcriptions of striking scenes in English life—a lesson by which our painters, and those of France as well, would do well to profit.

Mr. Burne Jones is represented by a single large picture, entitled 'The Beguiling of Merlin,' in drawing and composition evidently inspired by the illuminators of ancient missals, but cold and even sombre in colouring. The pale head of the sage, with upward-glancing eyes, and his white, thin hands, are admirably painted. The slender form and attenuated features of Vivien have a weird beauty, a Circe-like charm, and her head-gear of interlacing serpents is a singular and imaginative conception. In her dusky-purple robe, she looks like a sombre enchantress rather than the deviser of beguiling spells "with woven paces and with waving hands." Something of a more human and sensual grace would have suited the character better.

Even a bare mention of all the noted works of Art in the English section would stretch this necessarily brief notice into undue dimensions. The exhibit is a brilliant and a creditable one in all respects. Especially is it remarkable by its characteristic nationality. Save in the case of Alma-Tadema, an adopted son of English Art, and not one native and to the manner born, the influence of the Continental schools is unfelt and powerless. English Art is essentially and thoroughly English, and not a pale reflection from Paris or Munich. This fact is particularly noticeable in the choice of subjects, no less than in the minutiae of handling and colour. English scenery and English history, the fair faces of Englishwomen, the deeds of English heroes, the every-day life of England, furnish forth themes for the pencils of her artists. And her painters have not yet learned the pernicious doctrine that the choice of a subject is of no moment whatever, the execution alone being of any importance. That doctrine would probably prove correct did artists paint for an audience of critics and artists merely. But, outside of that chosen few lies the vast assemblage of the general public—a public which it has unfortunately become the fashion of late in certain Art-circles to regard with scorn. And it is impossible to look upon the interested countenances of the visitors to the English section and not to realise that for them painting had a new charm when she became the interpreter of history and poetry, of the fair face of Nature, and of the woes and wants of actual life.

LUCY H. HOOPER.

NOTES.

NEW PICTURES IN THE GALLERIES.—A painting that fetches \$17,600 at an auction-sale may or may not be a work of Art. It is an object of interest, however, especially if it is only about nine inches high and twelve inches long, and contains nine human figures, and is from the studio of Meissonier. 'The Gamblers,' by this artist, now in the gallery of Messrs. Knoedler and Company, is one of the most important members of the recent Oppenheim collection in Paris. It was sold last April for the price just mentioned. Meissonier calls it 'Innocents et Malins' ('The Simple-minded and the Evil-minded'). Two cavaliers of the time of Louis XIII. are playing cards with a couple of greenhorns who have been decoyed into a low saloon. The players are seated on each side of a table, near which are four standing cavaliers who witness the fleeing of the "innocents." A fifth cavalier has seated himself on the bench beside the winning pair, and, holding a half-emptied glass of sherry in his left hand, leans for-

ward and fixes his eyes mildly upon one of the victims, who is about to make the critical play, and whose companion is counselling him with reference to it. The leading player on the other side—his face is a fine study—awaits his decision with eagerness and confidence, seeming as if he might say, "No matter what card you put down, you poor fool, I have got you where I want you!" Meanwhile his accomplice on his left smiles triumphantly, and peers across the table into the mild face of the young imbecile, while three of the four spectators who stand around them reveal no sign of sympathy with either party. Their expression is imperturbable and stony. The fourth one, who smokes his pipe complacently, is evidently pleased at the impending slaughter. Though now exhibited for the first time in this country, the canvas bears the date of 1861. As is usual with Meissonier's works, it is painted in an almost negative key of colour, a fact which greatly increases the difficulty of representation, and enhances our admiration for